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SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE AWARD: GEETHA  
RAMASESHAN

REF: A. A. SECSTATE 99729

[1](#)B. B. CHENNAI 1214

1.(SBU) Summary: Per reftel A, please find Embassy's nomination for the Secretary of State's Award for International Women of Courage. Dozens of worthy candidates tirelessly work to further justice and equality in India; however, Geetha Ramaseshan's work to combat violence against women and trafficking-in-persons (TIP) stands out as she works with civil society and the Indian government to change how the country views these problems, and to increase arrest and prosecution rates of human traffickers in South India. Ms. Ramaseshan is a fitting model for women of courage and an example of the civil society-government cooperation the USG should praise in South Asia. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Ms. Ramaseshan is a distinguished attorney in family, criminal, and constitutional law with an emphasis on human and women's rights. She has won several landmark cases on behalf of victims of police brutality, custodial rape, and violence against women and children. In 2002, despite pressure from local authorities, Ms. Ramaseshan took a case involving a woman who was detained by police for alleged adultery and later found dead while in police custody. Her efforts motivated the court to direct an investigation into the incident, after which the court ordered the state to compensate the victim's family. In the case of a Dalit woman raped by police in 1999, Ms. Ramaseshan persuaded the key witness to resist threats from the police so that the case could be reopened and the perpetrator convicted. In 1997, Ms. Ramaseshan courageously argued a case in which a woman was gang-raped by four policemen and won convictions against all the accused.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Ms. Ramaseshan also has worked to combat one of the largest social problems facing India -- trafficking-in-persons. In 2001, the Madras High Court recognized Ms. Ramaseshan's service as a defender of women by assigning to her the investigation of a human trafficking ring in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka that transported victims, including children, to work in bonded labor in granite quarries. Her report resulted in the emancipation of 75 persons. In addition, Ms. Ramaseshan conducts training for police officers in Tamil Nadu and the National Police Academy in Hyderabad regarding trafficking of women and children and sexual harassment in the work place. Along with nongovernmental organizations and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Ms. Ramaseshan's work has contributed to a "paradigm shift" within police departments and the judiciary in South India, resulting in an increase in arrests and prosecutions of traffickers (reftel B).

[1](#)4. (U) In the Supreme Court of India, Ms. Ramaseshan has led several successful campaigns to garner equal rights for women, including amending the Indian Divorce Act to ensure

equal compensation and treatment of women. She also successfully challenged the constitutionality of an Indian criminal law that made adultery a crime only for women. Ms. Ramaseshan's work on an employment law case resulted in the overturning of state electricity board rules that denied employment to women on the grounds that their traditional clothing posed a work hazard. Currently, she is drafting a paper for United Nations Development Programme on "Gender Equity in the Justice Systems in South Asia and Iran."

15. (SBU) Contact Details: Full Name: Geetha Ramaseshan. Job Title/Association: Advocate, High Court of Madras; Special Prosecutor, Central Bureau of Investigation; Joint Secretary, High Court Mediation Center; Faculty, Media Law and Society, Asian College of Journalism. Date of Birth: July 28, 1957. Country of Birth: India. Citizenship: India. Address: 6, 4th Cross Street, Cit Colony, Mylapore, Chennai, 600 004. Telephone: (0091 44) 24991397, 91 98402 77836. Email: geetaramaseshan@gmail.com. Passport number: E 44 11 039.

16. (SBU) Comment: While Ms. Ramaseshan's selfless work has touched many lives, she has never been formally recognized by the GOI or any major international organization. Honoring her efforts to work within the Indian government -- through cases against cops, training officials, and legal battles -- will serve as a symbolic motivation to other women working on these important causes throughout South Asia. Moreover, given GOI indignation at remaining on the Tier Two Watchlist in the 2008 TIP Report, and consequent refusal to discuss trafficking issues with USG officials -- including Ambassador-at-Large Mark Lagon -- recognizing Ms. Ramaseshan's achievements would send the GOI a subtle message

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of U.S. support for those working to eradicate TIP. End  
comment.  
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